

"If we work hard, we can do it": A tale from an Olympic Gold medalist

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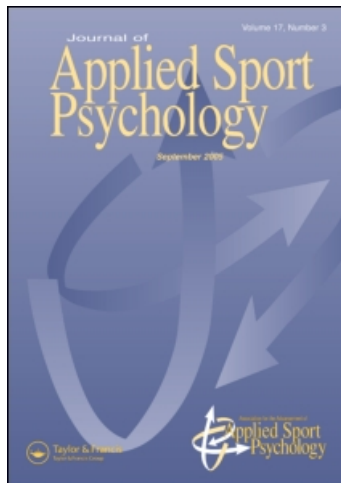
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“IF WE WORK HARD, WE CAN DO IT” A TALE FROM AN OLYMPIC (GOLD) MEDALLIST

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The purpose of this study was to gain day-to-day insight into how an elite athlete experiences competing in the Olympic Games with regard to perceived stress, the subsequent coping efforts, and the maintenance of a positive response outcome expectancy. One Norwegian female soccer player wrote a journal throughout the pre-camp and the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. “Tina” employed a range of coping strategies, both problem-focused and emotion focused, when faced with challenges such as feeling a lack of self-confidence and the team losing the first match. However, she kept a strong belief in her team’s ability to win and had a strong positive response outcome expectancy throughout the targeted period. The team won the Olympic Gold medal and Tina attributed this achievement to the hard work everybody on the team had exhibited over a long period of time. The results of this qualitative analysis are discussed with respect to contemporary theories of stress, coping, and motivation.

Performing at the highest level puts great demands on the individual. The ability to be mentally and physically prepared to perform in an important competition is an additional pressure the individual has to cope with alongside his or her own expectations and desires. For any athlete, the Olympic Games is one of the most challenging and prestigious competitions one can encounter. The Games have a logic and life of their own, being very different from any other sport endeavor. The ability to face and overcome the different distracters related with Olympic competition, both positive and negative, becomes an ongoing challenge for each participant.

Research concerning how people cope with extreme experiences has provided insight into how such demanding circumstances may be handled. For example, work by Sandal (1996) on populations such as adventurers (i.e., those involved in polar expeditions) and astronauts (i.e., those involved in space aviation projects) has revealed that participants on polar expeditions experience high anxiety at the beginning of the expedition. The same is evident on space missions. Sandal’s work has indicated that, in such stressful environments, the use of emotion-focused coping to address this anxiety was deemed not adaptable. This was because, in the case of polar explorers and astronauts, such coping strategies effected interpersonal relationships in a negative way (e.g., group members fail to inform about important issues and/or contradict the decisions of the leader due to emotional outbursts; Sandal, 1996). Past work has also examined the coping processes exhibited at the most challenging levels of sport participation. In such contexts, the use of active coping strategies has been associated with a higher degree of perceived control and satisfaction with results among elite athletes participating in international competitions (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1993; Pensgaard & Roberts, 1995;

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Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998). However, as Kim and Duda (2001) among others have pointed out, it is far too simplistic to assume that problem-focused strategies are adaptive and emotion-focused strategies always are maladaptive, especially within competitive sport. First, it depends on what kind of stressor the athlete is experiencing and at what time it is experienced (e.g., before, during, or after the competition), and second, whether the reported effectiveness of the strategy employed is examined during or following the event (i.e., short- versus long-term). Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the process of coping is dynamic, involving several phases of primary and secondary appraisals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In order to gain in-depth insight into the interplay between stress, coping, and effectiveness of specific coping strategies, one Norwegian participant at the Olympic Games in Sydney 2000 volunteered to write a journal throughout the pre-camp and the Games itself. This qualitative data formed the basis for the present paper. Specifically, the major purpose of this work was to try and reveal how an athlete perceives and deals with stressors during pre-camp and when competing at the Olympics, and discuss this process within existing conceptual frameworks. A secondary focus was to ascertain the interrelationships between perceived stress, coping strategies, and the maintenance of positive outcome expectations in the case of this athlete.

Coping and Control Within the Sport Domain

Previous research (e.g., Gould et al., 1993; Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998) has shown that one factor stands out as an important facet concerning athletes' experiences at Olympic competition: their perception of control. The concept of control has been the focus of numerous studies (Skinner, 1995) and it is not surprising that it also seems to play a significant role among athletes at the highest echelon of sport competition.

Skinner (1995) has proposed a tripartite agent-means-ends model of perceived control. In this model the *agent-means* connection concerns expectations that the person (agent) has regarding the means to produce a response. The *means-ends* connection refers to the link between potential causes and outcome (e.g., a person believes that the strategies he or she employs will lead to a desired outcome). The *agent-ends* beliefs are the connection between a person's perceptions that he or she has the capability to obtain the desired outcome. Thus, *agent-ends* beliefs involve both capacity and strategy beliefs. In an extensive review of the literature focused on perceived control, Biddle (1999) analyzed the different control concepts utilized in sport and exercise research using Skinner's model. Biddle concluded that "true perceived control must involve both perceived competence and contingency; thus control involves both agent-means and means-ends, or simply the direct agent-ends connection" (Biddle, 1999, p. 19).

The way we operationalize the concept of control is of great importance when we try to understand the way control beliefs function. For example, if we ask an athlete how strongly she believes that she will get the desired result in the Olympics, we are measuring the agent-ends connection. If we, on the other hand, ask whether she has the capacity to produce a response to handle possible distracters during the Olympics (e.g., increase effort), the athlete can have positive capacity belief, but not necessarily believe it will produce the desired outcome. If we consider the recent stress-coping literature, at least two models have incorporated the control concept as an agent-ends belief albeit in slightly different ways.

Jones (1995) has proposed a model specific to the sport context based on the work of Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989). In this model, it is assumed that control is the degree of influence the performer is able to exert over both behavior and performance (thus, an agent-ends connection), and this may color the way the athlete views and regards the sport experi-

ence. For example, athletes who have a positive goal attainment expectancy are believed to interpret anxiety symptoms (somatic and/or cognitive) as facilitative of performance, while athletes who have a negative goal attainment expectancy will interpret the same symptoms as debilitating. Findings involving high-level swimmers revealed partial support for this model, especially when the athletes emphasized performance goals more than outcome goals (Jones & Hanton, 1996).

This way of viewing perceived control is similar to the earlier model developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) who emphasize the importance of the role of both personal (i.e., beliefs, values) and situational factors when a person appraises and evaluates a stressful situation. Within their framework, coping is defined as any cognitive or behavioral action taken in order to deal with a stressful situation, and control is defined both as appraisal (i.e., the belief that a person can handle a stressful situation) and as coping (i.e., actually altering the situation). Lazarus (1991) later questioned whether we, in fact, always do want to be in control. He suggested that, in some cases, it creates more stress when a person perceives high levels of control when decisions have to be made. Consonant with Lazarus's (1991) thinking, Eriksen and Ursin (1999) found that having a positive response outcome expectancy was a more important predictor of positive health than high levels of perceived control.

The cognitive arousal theory of stress (CATS) developed by Ursin (1988) and Ursin and Eriksen (2001) is a comprehensive model that explicitly defines coping as *a positive response outcome expectancy (PROE)*. This could at first glance be classified as an agent-means control belief. However, Ursin and Eriksen (2001) state that a positive response outcome expectancy is a result of learning experiences and reflects a person's belief that he or she is able to obtain a positive outcome *regardless* of the particular strategies employed. Ursin (1988) argues that coping strategies in themselves do not predict differential outcomes, but rather suggests that the major determinant of positive outcomes is whether the person has a strong PROE. A high PROE, however, may be a result of the use of certain strategies (e.g., hard work, good training) that function as more probable antecedents for the development of a positive response outcome expectancy. Thus, it is clear that the concept of a PROE also can be categorized as an agent-end belief (Skinner, 1995). One attractive feature of the CATS is that coping is theoretically predicted to link to specific psychobiological responses, as is the use of defense mechanisms (see Ursin & Eriksen, 2001 for a detailed description and empirically support for the model). This feature separates the CATS from other models more commonly used within sport psychology research such as Lazarus's model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The positive response outcome expectancy concept as defined in CATS has much in common with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy (SE) concept. However, the PROE is more than self-efficacy. That is, it is a belief that incorporates both outcome expectations (i.e., the outcome is expected to be positive) and a self-efficacy belief (i.e. the person believes she/he can do it). Although the self-efficacy framework (Bandura, 1997) hardly can be categorized as a theory of stress per se, self-efficacy judgments have proven to be a predictor of performance outcomes when athletes are faced with challenging tasks (Feltz, 1992). Self-efficacy is, however, more difficult to classify within Skinner's framework. The definition of self-efficacy put forward by Bandura (1997) indicates that SE originally was conceptualized more as an agent-means belief than an agent-ends belief: "[SE judgments are the] beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p.3).

Based on the discussion so far, it seems reasonable to suggest that when competing in the Olympic Games, a strong agent-ends (e.g., "we can win the gold medal") belief should be more likely to predict successful performance than a strong agent-means belief (e.g., "I have confidence that I can accomplish a specific task"). The main reason is that an agent-end belief also incorporates a capacity belief and, thus, should reflect a stronger total belief.

We might speculate that an agent-end belief may fluctuate over the course of time while individuals are engaging in an especially challenging activity (such as participation in the Olympic Games), but previous sport research has not addressed this issue. Moreover, how such an agent-end belief (such as the PROE) is experienced by an athlete who is part of a team and therefore dependent upon how others perform in order to achieve the desired result, remains an open question.

Investigations to date concerning coping with stress when competing in the Olympics have, as far as we know, only focused upon the retrospective recall of the participants (e.g., Gould et al., 1993; Pensgaard & Roberts, 1995). In order to overcome this limitation and expand upon the current literature, this study examined the experience of stress and coping (as well as the interplay with potential variations in PROE) during Olympic competition. In particular, one of the members of the Norwegian Olympic Team volunteered to write a diary from the start of the pre-camp and throughout the Olympic Games. Employing a phenomenological analysis, the aim of this project was to obtain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the stress and coping processes an athlete may experience during a specific event at the highest level of competition. We were also interested in gaining greater awareness into corresponding motivational processes and the factors influencing and the implications of an athlete's PROE in such conditions.

METHOD

The approach used in this study can be categorized as one of the personal experience methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), where the main information comes from the individual writing a journal. The focus here is to "experience the experience" of an individual, and the epistemological background stems from Dewey (1938) who claimed that the study of experience is the study of life, and that a person is both an individual and social entity. Experiences can be understood in a number of ways, and one crucial element is to understand the relationship between the researcher and the "story teller." Because the researcher in this case also was present in the same field the athlete was writing about the Olympics, this would naturally influence the nature of the field text. Thus, the story told will always be shaped by the relationship between and experiences of both the researcher and the participant. The aim of the researcher is not only to "present the case" of the athlete, but also to discover, construct, and reconstruct meaning of the texts.

The possibility of accessing athletes who compete in the Olympics, and who are willing to participate in a research project during the Games, is both extremely difficult and rare due to obvious reasons. First, any changes in routines and focus during the preparation phase may interfere with the athlete's performance, and second, by addressing specific issues (in order to answer specific research questions), one may make the athlete aware of thoughts and emotions he or she was not aware of beforehand. Dealing with such issues when leading up to, or engaged in a major competition, can be detrimental. The case here was that the athlete herself wanted to share her feelings and thoughts during this specific period. The first author served as a sport psychology consultant for Tina's team during the Olympic Games and Tina¹ wanted to use the writing both as a way of communication with this consultant, and as a part of a larger research project. Advising the athletes to write daily logs or journals in order to monitor their psychological states has been part of this consultant's work methods for years and, thus, many of the players were familiar with this procedure. Tina spontaneously volunteered to let the first author use her daily journal for research purposes. It was made clear that Tina could withdraw

¹A pseudonym.

from the study at any time, and that she would approve anything that would be presented or published from her diary. Tina made it apparent that she would write a diary regardless of whether or not it was used for research purposes and believed that this would not have any negative impact on her performance.

As such, the current study could be considered to be employing a single-subject design and also be reflective of an ethnographic methodology although journal writing in itself is, as already mentioned, a personal experience method (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The findings of the present research stem from the experiences of one athlete and cannot be seen to represent the experiences of other athletes participating in the Olympic Games.

Procedure and Measures

The player was asked to write in her journal everyday, as long as it did not disturb her preparations. In order to get a quantitative indication concerning what she was thinking about during the day, she was given a list of nine different broad topics (Table 1) and asked to indicate via percentage approximately how much she was thinking of each topic, and whether the thoughts were positive or negative. She could also add topics of her own if she desired. Regarding the journal, Tina was asked to reflect upon what she experienced each day, and write down her thoughts and feelings. Basically, she could write about anything she wanted. Once in a while she would ask the first author to read through what she had written so far (a procedure Tina was used to through years of working with the first author) and this was used as background for discussions.

In order to quantify the stability of Tina's mood during the targeted time period each day was rated (by the first author together with Tina) on a 6-point scale in terms of how the day in general had been: (1) a bad day, (2) negative mood, but better than bad, (3) a mixed day, (4) a good day, (5) a very good day, and (6) an excellent day.

Fieldwork of First Author/Consultant

I (the first author) had worked as a sport psychologist for this team for a period of 4 years prior to the 2000 Olympic Games (1995–96, 1998–present), and was therefore an integrated part of the support staff. As part of my daily routine, I have always written reports at the end of the day in which I express my thoughts and observations. Thus, writing a field diary was already part of my practice. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) argue that it is important for the researcher to become aware of her or his subjectivity and to monitor the shape of his or her understanding. Writing a daily log helped this reflexive process. My philosophy of consulting has always been grounded in a humanistic and educational approach inspired by Orlick (1993) and Deci and Ryan (1985). Thus, I place importance on the development and maintenance of intrinsic motivation when I consult with athletes. Being both a consultant and a researcher in a highly competitive setting is a challenging combination (Ronglan, 2000). However, my primary role during the pre-camp and the Games was that of a consultant, and most of the analyses of data were conducted after the closing of the games.

As the sport psychology consultant for the women's soccer team, I was fully accredited. This meant that I had access to every arena, changing room, and playing field, and also meant that I lived with the team in the Olympic Village. In essence, I was familiar with and part of the various situations in which Tina experienced during the time of this study.

Fieldwork can be a good instrument for learning about contexts that the athlete is part of and fostering an understanding of the framework within which the athlete interprets her thoughts, feelings, and actions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996). Although this was not an ethnographic study per se, the field observations that were made were used as a background for the analyses

Table 1
Thought Patterns for Tina During the Pre-Camp and the 2000 Olympic Game

Date	1% ^a	2%	3%	4%	5%	6%	7%	8%	9%	Comment
09/03	20 –	3 –	25 +	0	15 +	15 +	20 +	2 +	0	
09/04	30 –	0	15 +	5 +	0	20 +	25 +	0	5 –	
09/05	20 +	10 +	10 +	0	0	10 +	25 +	10 +	15 +	
09/06	20 +	0	20 –	10 +	0	20 +	25 +	0	5 +	
09/07	20 +	0	20 +	5 +	5 –	10 +	15 +	10 +	15 +	
09/08	15 +	0	20 +	10 –	5 –	15 +	15 +	10 +	10 +	Training match
09/09	25 +	0	15 +	0	0	15 +	0	25 +	20 +	
09/10	20 +	10 +	10 +	0	0	20 +	20 +	10 +	10 +	
09/11	25 +	5 +	5 +	5 –	5 –	15 +	10 +	10 –	20 –	
09/12	30 +	5 –	10 +	5 +	5 +	10 +	25 +	0	10 +	
09/13	15 +	0	15 +	10 +	5 +	25 +	25 +	0	5 +	
09/14	10 +	0	5 +	15 +	10 +	20 +	30 +	10 +	0	USA 0-2
09/15	30 +	5 +	10 +	15 +	5 +	10 +	15 +	0	10 +	
09/16	15 +	10 +	15 +	15 +	15 +	10 +	5 +	5 –	10 –	
09/17	25 +	0	10 +	10 –	5 +	20 +	15 –	10 –	5 +	NIGERIA 3-1
09/18	20 +	0	10 +	5 –	5 –	25 +	15 –	10 +	10 +	
09/19	25 +	5 +	5 +	15 +	15 +	15 +	10 +	5 +	5 +	
09/20	20 +	0	10 +	10 +	10 – +	20 +	10 – +	10 +	10 +	CHINA 2-1
09/21	25 +	0	0	15 +	0	30 +	10	10 +	10 +	
09/22	20 +	5 +	10 +	10 +	0	25 +	10 +	10 +	10 +	
09/23	15 +	0	15 +	15 +	0	20 +	15	10 +	10 +	
09/24	10 +	5 +	5 +	15 –	10 +	15 +	10 +	15 +	15 +	GERMANY 1-0
09/25	25 +	5 +	10 +	10 –	10 –	20 +	10 –	10 +	0	
09/26	20 +	5 +	10 +	15 +	0	20 +	10 –	0	20 –	
09/27	25 +	0	15 +	10 +	5 +	25 +	10 +	10 +	0	
09/28	20 +	10 +	10 +	10 +	15 +	25 +	10 +	0	0	USA 3-2

1. Family and friends; 2. Economy; 3. The future (life after the Olympics); 4. The other competitors (teams); 5. The result; 6. Belief in the team; 7. Own performance; 8. Other things happening in the world; 9. My life situation in general. (+) = positive thoughts; (–) = negative thoughts.

of the journal. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) have emphasized, qualitative research is most effectively presented within a rich narrative. However, my main focus was to be a consultant, and thus the field notes and observations that were made throughout this period were very similar to what I always do as part of my consulting practice.

Because the Olympic Games are so different in many aspects from other sport competitions, it was especially valuable to be present during the training camp and entire competition. It was important to me to have equal amount of contact with all players, and in so doing I monitored whom I talked with each day and also whether particular incidents occurred. I never felt that there was a conflict between the researcher role and the consultant role. This part of

the paper is the only time my person is explicitly present in the text, although the first author is actually present at all time. The author's presence in a text has caused a lot of debate throughout the last decade (Sparkes, 1994). One of the problems of presenting texts is to write oneself into it (Billing, 1994; Fine, Wesen, & Wong, 2000, Johnsen, 2001). The presence of "self" should never overshadow the story of "others," so in order to keep the focus on Tina's story, my presence with respect to descriptions will only be expressed implicitly through the analyses.

Use of traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research has become problematic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Unlike a positivistic paradigm, which bases its judgement criteria on the belief that there is a "real world" that can be known if one just uses the right methods, an interpretive and non-foundationalistic paradigm has accepted the relativist implications of the fact that there can be no theory-free observation or knowledge (Smith & Deemer, 2000). However, this does not imply that "anything goes," and as Sparkes (1998; states: "it is possible to advocate a view that is both relativistic and pluralistic, but not mindless" (p. 377).

Data Analysis

The journal was read and re-read numerous times by the first author and the themes that emerged were discussed with both the player and the co-author and agreed upon with these two individuals. It was natural to break down the journal into four different time phases: (1) pre-camp, (2) qualifying matches, (3) semi-final, and (4) the final game. In this paper, we are particularly focusing upon issues concerning perceptions of stress and coping with the stress experienced as well as related implications for the athlete's PROE. Qualitative data can be presented in a number of ways and the main goal is to try and capture the richness and depth that is possible. We have therefore chosen to include a number of citations from the journal so that the reader has the possibility to experience some of the details of the writings (Sparkes, 1994).

The different drafts of the article, as it was developing, were all given to Tina for her to decide whether we had given a fair and accurate reflection of her experience (Acker, Barry, & Essesweld, 1983). After reading the final draft she wrote back to us:

Reading this [the article] brought me back to the Olympic Games once more. This is how I experienced it. I remember the feeling so well!

This type of member checking acts as a form of validation. However, it will always be the researcher or writer who selects and includes the content. Thus, we should be aware of the role of the researcher(s). Because the first author was present during the whole period in question in this study, this has probably influenced the experience of Tina. When asked whether this was the case, Tina said:

I have known [the first author] for a long time. Writing this journal was something I wanted to do. The list I was given in order to indicate how much I was thinking on different issues during the day only worked as a kind of help at the outset. Basically, I wrote about what ever I felt was important to me and did not follow the list. I wanted to write this journal as a way of venting out my feelings and thoughts.

Although Tina states that the first author's presence did not influence her experience or writing it is plausible to assume that this still is the case. Altheide and Johnson (1994) discuss this issue in detail and imply that the tacit knowledge of the researcher present in the

field is vital in order to give a rich description of the context. Thus, being in the field could be viewed as a resource for understanding the same context the journal writer is living in.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tina has competed internationally for 10 years and is therefore a very experienced player. Her team won the World Championship in 1995 and earned a bronze medal at an earlier Olympic Games. The team goal for the Olympic Games in Sydney was a gold medal, which was deemed a realistic but ambitious goal. Tina wrote in her journal every day, and her writing was discussed with her whenever she felt it was necessary. She explicitly said that the writing helped her to get "frustrations out of her system" and to gain perspective, a view shared by many participants in qualitative studies (Sparkes, 1994). We will focus on the thought patterns, mood, and the stress/coping process of Tina during the four periods.

Thought Patterns and Mood

When we look at Tina's thought pattern during the different periods, it is clear that she has mainly positive thoughts throughout (Table 1). The content of thoughts involves "family and friends" as the main category, as well as "belief in the team," and "own performance." Non-Olympic thoughts like "life after" and "other things happening in the world" becomes less significant when the qualifying matches commence. Thus, she seems to narrow her focus when the competitions begins. Regarding negative thoughts, they were for the most part centered around thoughts about the other competitors. She reports no negative thoughts whatsoever about her own team. Further, when it comes to her own performance, she is primarily positive although she expresses some concerns in her journal. Getting insight into elite athletes' thought patterns on a daily basis when competing in major competitions is a new area of inquiry within sport psychology. Such a procedure may provide important information that could foster a greater understanding of athletes' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses in such demanding situations.

There are probably large individual differences when thought content is the focus of interest, and it may be more important to consider whether the thoughts are positive or negative rather than the actual content, especially in a long-term perspective. Findings reported by Van Raalte, Cornelius, Brewer, and Hatten (2000), who studied antecedents and consequences of positive and negative self-talk in competitive tennis players, concluded that neither predicted winning nor losing. Rather, they found large individual differences in how type of self-talk effected performance. We need more knowledge about how athletes' cognitions influence coping over-time as well as with respect to the immediate performance.

Figure 1 gives an indication of how Tina's mood fluctuated during the targeted period. Generally, her mood was positive, but she experienced one major down period, and that was after the first qualifying match against USA where the team lost 2–0. She seemed to recover quickly, and stabilized herself on a positive, but slightly lower level of mood (i.e., lower than prior to this first match). This level seemed to hold up throughout the rest of the period. The proposed link between mood (or emotions), cognition, and coping (Lazarus, 1991) suggests that more attention should be given the role of mood fluctuation or stability in order to gain awareness of how current mood effects how an athlete handles stress.

The pre-camp. The team squad arrived to Australia 14 days before the first official game. Ten of these days were spent on the Northwest coast to get used to the climate and the time difference. The first part of the pre-camp is characterized by a mixture of excitement, doubts and a strong belief in the team. On the third day of the pre-camp, Tina writes:

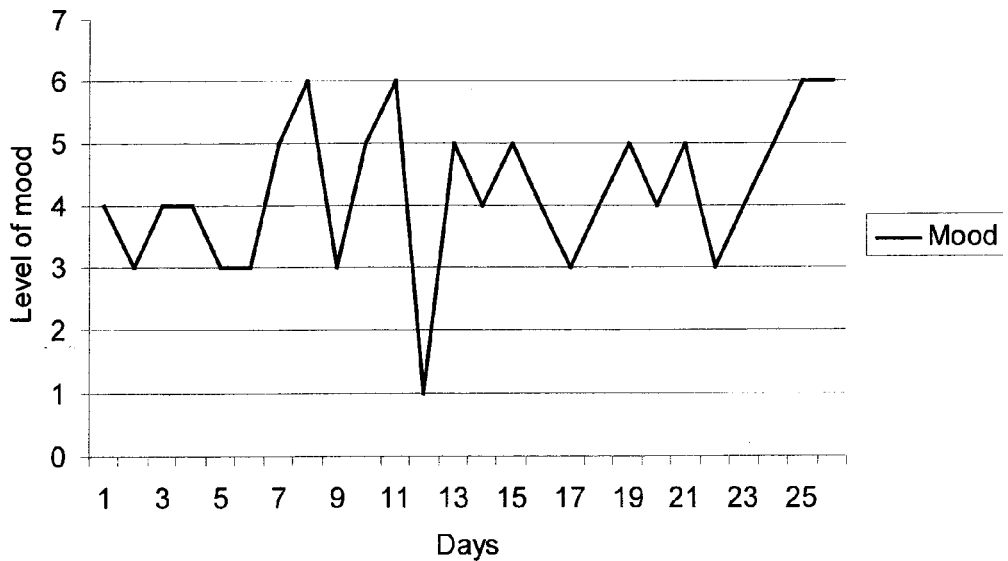


Figure 1. Variations in Tina's mood during the targeted period.

The mood is really good and there is good intensity when we are training. A lot of the players performed well on the training session today, everybody looks confident and believes in our strategy. On the bus today on our way to the training, I sat alone thinking about GOLD, and got a good feeling; I thought that I will play good matches all the time and that I will be the match winner in the finals, scoring on a volley in the last minute. I almost felt the intensity like I am sure it will be after winning such a final . . . it was cool!!

However, Tina reveals a surprisingly large variation in her own self-confidence during this period. Although she writes that she is not stressed and feels calm and relaxed, it is still evident that her level of confidence was influenced by (a) her own performance during the training sessions, and (b) the fact that all the players have to control their weight everyday—a routine to make sure that the athletes have a stable weight. She has never liked the weighing procedure, although it is only the medical doctor and the player herself that knows the results. She comments in her diary that she is a bit uncomfortable with her own weight at the moment, and thus, this activity is interpreted in a slightly negative manner.

Her self-confidence is high during the first few days, but declines during the middle of the pre-camp period when the team also plays a poor training match. However, although she is doubtful about her own performance, she has a strong belief in the team that they are able to win the gold medal, and she praises the atmosphere and the spirit within the team. The last training session at the pre-camp became a very positive experience, and on the 10th of September she writes:

I felt that I did well in training today. I was very motivated and ready, positive and in high spirits like the rest of the team. I have the: WE WILL WIN THE GOLD MEDAL feeling! . . . My self-confidence increases as a result of a good performance like today—so I really look forward to the next week.

The qualifying games. Moving from the exclusive surroundings on the Gold Coast to a rainy and much colder Melbourne represented a rather big change for the players. The first match was played at the old Olympic Stadium. The seating capacity in the stadium is 96,000 spectators and the stands were full, which is a different world from the 300–400 spectators the Norwegian players are used to when playing in their national league. Tina feels very confident before the first match. In fact she is worried about over-confidence. The beginning of the match is positive, but after 20 minutes they are down 1–0 and after that nothing is going as planned. At the conclusion of the match (which was lost 2–0), Tina is devastated and extremely disappointed in especially her own, but also the team's performance. She believes that maybe they chose the wrong tactic, which in this respect must be considered to be an adaptive way of coping because she is attributing the result as it is an unstable and controllable explanation for "failure" (Biddle, 1993). She puts a lot of effort into dealing with her disappointment. She is in close contact with a former coach back home and explains that she thinks it is a good thing to "empty her frustration" outside the group, so that her dissatisfaction will not affect the other players. She writes:

Am really disappointed now and only want to cry, but I know so well that there is nothing I can do about it now. Have talked the game through with [her coach], it feels good to empty my frustration outside the group. I do not doubt our game or the way we play our game—I just wanted to put pressure a bit higher on the field because then we also becomes more aggressive.

Thus, she seeks what we would characterise as both social emotional and instrumental support (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and she is also venting her emotion both to the sport psychology consultant and to her club coach back home. She realises that she cannot control what has happened and her use of emotion-focused strategies becomes an adaptive way of dealing with the situation. She primarily receives from her former coach instrumental support and she uses this support to build up her self-confidence. Already the day after the match, much of the frustration and disappointment is dealt with, and she feels positive and much more optimistic. She writes:

I am in a good mood today, it helps to vent your frustration immediately so this is a good day and it is actually wonderful to go for a morning run! There was not much sleep last night, but I managed to get finished with the game!

The day after the match the team always has restitution training; often the whole team plus the support staff go for a 20-minute easy jog in a nearby park in order to recover from the match the day before and prepare for a new match in two days. In spite of the loss, the spirit is positive and the mood is generally good. The players and the coach seem to have recovered from yesterday's disappointment.

The squad now moves to Canberra to play the last two matches before the play-off. This seems to be a welcome change for the players. The hotel rooms are larger and brighter, and the whole atmosphere is more relaxed and open. The players agree that the Melbourne experience was a mistake and from now on things are going to be different. As Faulkner and Sparkes (1999) have commented upon, a change of scenery may affect behavior in a positive way, and this seemed to be the case for Tina and the team.

Before the second game, Tina expresses confidence mixed with anger. She is angry because she feels that the coach is a bit defensive. At a meeting, he says that if China beats the USA, we can manage even if we only draw against Nigeria. Tina's reaction is adamant, and in her journal she writes: "What rubbish!!!! There is no need to mention anything about results.

We know very well what is at stake here!” She is more uncertain in terms of the result than prior to the first match where she was almost certain they would win, but she interprets this as a good sign. She continues to praise the spirit of the team and indirectly this seems to help her improve her own mood also. In one of the team meetings she and a teammate surprisingly introduce a game where everybody ends up crying with laughter. This is a breakthrough for the team in a sense that everybody relaxes a little bit and are not afraid to make a fool of themselves. Without knowing it, Tina and her teammate have managed to ease some of the tension that had built up after the loss in the first match.

The team wins the second match, but she is still not happy with her own performance. She now explicitly states that her own performance is a growing source of stress. A turning-point seems to emerge at Day 19 when she discusses her own doubts in the journal and concludes that the only recipe is to work as hard as she can and enjoy every minute of this experience. Tina has been more withdrawn the last few days and less talkative than what is her usual demeanour. It seems a paradox that she has stated in her journal that she does not become nervous before the games, yet it is obvious that her level of performance is a constant worry to her. It is therefore a major step forward in the right direction when she admits that her concern about her own performance is problematic to her. There seems to be a shift from what Roth and Cohen (1986) would label avoidance-oriented coping towards a more approach and problem-oriented coping perspective. She actively develops a plan for how she wants to deal with the situation.

Before the third match (which the team has to win to reach the semi-finals), Tina is mixed in her belief that the team will win, but she is certain that she will do her best to play up to her potential. However, she expresses confidence in her teammates. She writes:

I do fluctuate in the belief that we can beat China, at the same time I am more often than not certain that we will win; is that a good sign?? I believe in it because we know what we have to do to win: WORK HARD ALL THE TIME! I was so certain before the match against the USA, that we would win, and then I was very wrong, so that is why I am more uncertain today (is this logical?). I do believe in our team, very strongly too. Maybe it is my own abilities I don't trust. I have not played any good games while I have been here, so no wonder that I am doubtful.

Before the match, the whole team goes for a walk in the park as is always done as part of the pre-game preparations. Every time one or two players will come up and talk about different things they are concerned about. This day, Tina makes contact with me and we talk about how important it is to loosen up and just do what we do during the training sessions. Everybody has performed well in training so it is obvious that the team is not performing as well as they can when they are playing matches. We talked about the importance of enjoying the experience. In her journal, Tina writes that the chat was helpful, and when her former coach also sends her a positive encouragement, she states that now she really *wants* (her emphasis) to beat them (China). Tina is again employing social instrumental support in order to cope with her frustration.

Tina and the rest of the team play their best match up to this point in the competition, and qualify for the semi-finals. The self-confidence of both Tina and the team is enhanced, and everybody is relieved that they have made it so far. The players get a day off, which is very much welcomed. Almost every day Tina comments on the unique atmosphere on the team, and the positive way everybody seems to behave. She enjoys being part of the team. The importance of a productive team climate on an elite level has been advocated by several researchers (e.g., Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002). Generally, athletes respond positively to a

climate that focuses on development and improvement rather than only producing good results. Further, because life at the elite level is characterized by an immense focus from the media on winning, it may be even more important that the "micro" climate surrounding the athlete has a minimal emphasis on competitive outcomes (Duda, 2001; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002).

Tina comments upon the unique atmosphere on the team several times throughout her journal. She explicitly states that she is amazed that there have been no signs of any form of conflict during the 30 days the team was together. Even though the goal of winning the gold medal was very clear at the outset of the Games, this was hardly ever mentioned explicitly during the tournament itself. The focus in the team meetings was mainly on improving the team's game, and playing the way the team knows they can in their best moments. Thus, although the objective setting was indeed ego-involving (Nicholls, 1989), the focus within the team was more on the different tasks that had to be effectively managed. This seems to contradict some of the claims made by Harwood, Hardy, and Swain (2000) that in such competitive environments it is next to impossible to be task-involved.

However, there seems to be a complex dynamic between individual goal focus and team goal focus. As we have seen so far, it is evident that Tina is focused upon winning and it is obvious that it means a lot to her. But then when the team does win, she tends to be more preoccupied with the fact of whether or not they (and herself in particular) have played well more than the result. Thus, it seems that the winning focus functions as an over-riding goal or driving force, while the level of performance is the day-to-day measure of what success means to a player. It seems evident that we need more research with a prospective, longitudinal, day-to-day design in order to be able to capture such motivational dynamics in more detail and to understand their implications for athletes.

The semi-finals. There is a three-day period between the match against China and the semi-final game against Germany. The team moves from Canberra to the hectic life in the Olympic Village. On one of the last training camps before the Olympics, the whole squad had gone through different exercises where the emphasis was to draw upon the past Olympic experience present within the team. Five of the players and two from the support staff had participated in the 1996 Atlanta Games, and it was deemed important to learn the lessons from those persons. Thus, stemming from these discussions, when the team arrived at the Olympic Village, everybody knew about the security procedures and that delays were to be expected.

The team was situated in the "Norwegian corner" of the village, with short distances to both the eating area and to the transportation area. Although the living quarters had lower standards than other parts of the Village, this was outweighed by the fact that it was quiet at night and close to the important facilities. The team was assigned to three barracks, two large (12 persons in each) and one small (4 persons). Everybody (both players and support staff) had a roommate. In the large barracks, a "social room" was created with televisions and different games. The room was decorated with supporter effects like flags and posters. Other Norwegian athletes lived nearby so the surroundings were friendly and familiar. Tina makes a point in the journal that she thinks it is a great benefit to her that she has experienced living in an Olympic village before.

The preparation for the semi-finals is a mixed experience for Tina. The team is watching a few minutes of a video from a former match against the same team, a game in which Tina played poorly. All the bad feelings come back to her, and she even notices that her heart rate rises during the meeting. She feels very uncomfortable and becomes very quiet and withdrawn from the discussions. In her journal she wrote:

Today I felt that I was beside myself. I did not think much about the match, really, I read my

book, and did the things I thought were the right things to do, but I was too much locked up in my own thoughts. . . . I was too passive, and all I could think about was the previous game against this team.

In hindsight it was obvious that Tina choose the wrong strategy when she withdrew from the others and barricaded herself with a book. Holding the position she has within the team, the other players would be reluctant to intrude with her preparations because they would believe this is how she wanted it to be. However, both based on what Tina herself writes in the journal and also the observations of the first author, this is clearly not the appropriate way for Tina to behave in the lead-up to a match. Some actions were taken in order to try and involve her in conversations when driving to the game, but Tina just gave short answers and explained later in her journal that:

Talked a little bit with _____, but was not receptive to anything today. Did not contribute to the team at all, and did not manage to focus on the match. . . . During the match I was also thinking too much. I thought about everything from spectators, to what I could do. Talked very little on the field and was not “connected” in my head.

The team qualifies for the final, but it is striking to see how dissatisfied Tina is in spite of the achievement so far. She explicitly writes that she is not satisfied even though they won the match. This is another indication that for some athletes on an elite level, winning is clearly not the only goal – it is equally or perhaps more important to perform up to their own standard of performance. Indeed, if the latter is occurring, then the former is also more likely to follow (Duda, 1992, 2001; Nicholls, 1992).

The final. The day before the final is another turning point. Tina is extremely satisfied with the last training session, and notes that everybody looks sharp and ready for the final game. Her disappointment over the semi-finals is replaced with renewed belief in her own abilities. In the Olympic Village, the spirit is very high among the team members and laughter is everywhere. As Tina says: “My self-confidence increases along with my spirit/mood.” On match day, the positive spirit continues and the emphasis among the players is on enjoying the moment. Before the game, Tina writes in her journal: “Everybody is full of joy and energy and excitement; myself, I believe we can do this.” Again, a shift from a passive, avoidance oriented coping type of style, which characterized Tina prior to the semi-finals, to a more active and problem-solving approach is observed. Tina again uses social support—both emotional and instrumental—as a coping strategy, but she also focuses on her wish to play up to her potential, not being satisfied with the result itself.

The final turns out to be a classic match with extreme excitement. The USA team takes an early lead. Contrary to the first match when these two teams played against each other and the USA won 2–0, Norway this time seems better prepared in the sense that they continue to attack and play offensive soccer, and the team seems less disturbed by the early goal. Minutes before half time, Norway ties the score. The mood in the Norwegian changing room during half time is intense and positive. The coach emphasises that it is important to never give up no matter what happens. The players promise each other to give it all for each other. Although the USA team has possession of the ball most of the time, the Norwegian team is a constant threat when they are attacking. Midway through the second half, Norway scores a second goal and is leading 2–1. The play goes to injury time, and with only seconds left to play, the unbelievable happens—the USA team manage to tie. The two teams now have to play extra time (2 x 15 minutes), meaning the team which scores first within this period will have won the game (called “the golden goal” because the first team that scores has won the match). If none of the

teams manage to score, there will be a penalty shoot out. Tina gathers the team in the centre circle and urges her teammates to stay positive and be aggressive and go for every ball. Loud music is played at the stadium and the Norwegian players start to dance and clap their hands just before the referee start the first extra time period. Eleven minutes and 11 seconds into the first extra time period, Norway scores the vital goal and becomes the Olympic Gold medal winner.

Tina ends her journal with the following:

This has been our tournament, not because we've been lucky, but because we have really worked hard during the training sessions. We've had excellent training sessions, and we've had faith in what we've been doing. Not everything has been joyful, but in the end we got paid for our investment. I did not always agree with everything we did, but I vented my feelings to people outside the inner circle. This has been a very good day! WE DID IT!!!!

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The overall aim of this project was to obtain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the stress and coping processes an athlete may experience during a specific event such as the Olympic Games, and the role of a having a positive response outcome expectancy in regard to such processes. Tina, a Norwegian Olympic participant, volunteered to write a daily journal throughout the precamp and the Olympic Games. The information gleaned from this journal is the platform for these analyses, in addition to the observations made by the first author who was present during this player's preparation for and participation in the Sydney games.

Stress and Coping During the Pre-Camp and the Olympic Games

Interestingly, Tina claims at an early stage that stress is not a problem for her, yet throughout her journal she describes incidents that clearly would affect her focus and performance if she did not deal with them. Clearly, Tina did experience various sources of stress during the targeted period, such as doubts regarding her own abilities, dissatisfaction with her own performance, and a degree of discontent with the team's philosophy of play, especially after the first game. Indeed, her "mood index" revealed that she had rather strong fluctuations in mood state (positive and negative) during the pre-camp and Games.

In order to cope with the different stressors she employed a range of different coping strategies varying from emotion-focused strategies (e.g., venting to a previous coach), to more problem-focused strategies (e.g., seeking advice from both her former coach and the sport psychologist). The use of emotion-focused strategies was deemed maladaptive during expeditions and space missions (Sandal, 1996), while Tina seems to have gained from being able to vent her emotions when needed. One major difference, however, is that Tina used persons outside the squad, or the sport psychology consultant to reduce her frustration. This possibility is more or less ruled out when one takes part in an expedition, or is part of a space mission. Thus, it seems that elite athletes may have a wider range of coping possibilities and forums than persons in other extreme settings.

The final ended up being the best match the team played with Tina being one of the dominating players. This was especially true when the extra time was needed in order to settle the score, Tina rose to the occasion and managed to motivate her team to continue to fight for the Gold medal. Instead of being devastated when the USA team tied just before the time was up, she urged the rest of the team to continue the battle, a typical approach-oriented way of coping.

From an observer's perspective, this approach seemed to completely overwhelm the other team. The desire to carry on no matter what happens seems to be a vital strategy, especially when there still is time to do something active with the situation. The use of an emotion-focused strategy, like venting one's emotions, could also prove to be an adaptive strategy in this setting if it was followed by immediate re-focusing and action (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This underlines the fact that effectiveness rather than the type of strategy employed is of importance when examining how athletes deal with acute stressors.

Positive Response Outcome Expectancy

It is essential to note that although there were some minor fluctuations, Tina continued to have a positive response outcome expectancy throughout the pre-camp and the tournament itself. This is in accordance with CATS (Ursin & Eriksen, 2001) that claims that a positive response outcome expectancy is central regarding effectively dealing with stressors. High levels of PROE are assumed to come as a result of a learning process where the individual garners that she or he is able to deal with different situations in a successful manner. In contrast, low outcome expectancies are expected to lead to helplessness, and even worse, negative outcome expectancies may lead to hopelessness (Ursin, 1988). Tina's team had beaten their major opponents several times earlier the same year. Thus, they knew that they were at the same level as their opponents, even though they did not play well in the beginning of the tournament.

Clearly, it appears that having successful past experiences is as vital to creating a high PROE as it is for developing a high self-efficacy. In Bandura's (1997) terms, one might say that the team had high levels of collective efficacy (at least in Tina's view). A major challenge, both in society in general and in sport in particular, is to manage to create a strong sense of group efficacy among individuals and to maintain this feeling in spite of setbacks and unforeseen problems (Bandura, 1997). The term collective efficacy refers to either the aggregated sum of the self-efficacy of the members of the group, or the aggregated sum of members' beliefs in their group's efficacy. The aggregated sum of the individuals' self-efficacy is most relevant when the outcome is dependent on the independent contribution of each member (e.g., a relay race). The belief in the group's efficacy is relevant when the outcome is dependent upon highly interdependent effort, and where the members can have a high belief in their team despite instances of low personal efficacy (e.g., in soccer). Perceived collective efficacy is assumed to influence how much effort individuals will exhibit in the group (Bandura, 1997; Paskevich, Brawley, Dorsch, & Widmeyer, 1995), and this is supported by the information gleaned from Tina's journal, although this only reflects her perceptions of the situation.

If we take this one step further, the current results suggests that high collective efficacy can feed into (a) individual players and the team as a whole maintaining a high positive response outcome expectancy, and (b) the enhancement of a player's personal self-efficacy, given that the player in question feels that she is a positive contributor to the team's result. Overall, in a short-term perspective, when PROE is group-based (as it is likely to be within any team sport), confidence in one's team performance may be more important than individual self-efficacy in regard to fluctuations in PROE (and team performance, per se). Across a limited time period, as evidenced in the current findings, the congruence between player's judgements about her team's capabilities and her own efficacy may rise and fall. However, in a long-term perspective, it seems reasonable that one should aim at a coherent (and close in regard to strength) relationship between a player's self-efficacy judgements and collective efficacy in a team sport context.

For the coach, it becomes vital that he or she manages to create as many positive learning situations as possible so that the team as a whole develops a strong faith in the possibility of

reaching the goal. So, when Tina writes: "If we work hard, we can do it" she honestly believes in what she is proclaiming mainly because she has experienced that it is in fact possible. Having a high agent-end belief, to use Skinner's (1995) terminology, may be especially important and effective within elite sport, providing the physical abilities are present. Thus, a strong belief in a positive outcome may manage to override the smaller set-backs and temporary disappointments an athlete may experience. In this way, possible stressors may be interpreted as facilitating rather than debilitating (Jones, 1995), because the players will be confident that they can meet the challenges they are facing.

Lastly, it was evident that Tina increased her self-confidence considerably when she had performed well in training. We need to investigate further the importance of successful training sessions prior to important events as well as the importance of performing well as a team earlier in the season. This, again, highlights the importance of the coach and how he or she may foster a productive motivational climate in order to provide athletes with optimal conditions for preparation and optimal performance.

Limitations of This Study

We do not claim that Tina's experiences can automatically be generalized to other Olympic athletes. The aim of this study was to gain in-depth and unique insight into one athlete's Olympic experiences. Other methodologies must be employed if one wants to investigate whether Tina's experiences are common among Olympic athletes. Journal writing analyses do not search for generalized understandings, but rather as Clandinin and Connelly (1994) argue, journal writing is "A powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experience" (p. 421). Future studies should continue to try and use this methodology to capture the daily experiences of elite athletes both during discrete competitive events and across competitive seasons, but also during preparation and off-season periods. Such work will hopefully provide better understanding of the dynamics and content of their lives.

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